



A Case Study Documenting Collegiate Student Folklore and Traditions

by Igor Polotai

During certain days of the semester, when you walk by the Saunders College of Business, you might notice a most peculiar sight: a mass of soapy foam, swallowing up the entire fountain and spilling over onto the grassy areas nearby. Sometimes, it even expands enough to reach halfway up the neighboring trees. This is a common occurrence at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in upstate New York and is a tradition upheld by individual students and Greek organizations. What does the existence and persistence of traditions such as this tell us about the RIT student? Through these traditions, can we glean a deeper understanding of how RIT students view and interact with their campus environment? Just what is the folklore of the collegiate student? For the last two years, I have been investigating these questions, trying to understand and document the folklore of my fellow students from the perspective of being one myself. Combining history, folklore, and anthropology, I aimed to develop a community resource by RIT students for RIT students, a way for us to preserve our unique culture and educate future generations of the student body on our past. As I have come to appreciate, collegiate folklore offers a unique opportunity to understand folklore's fundamentals, and by examining and analyzing this case study, we can begin to piece together why this area of folklore can be so valuable to study for all folklorists.

About the photo: RIT fountain after a traditional soaping by students, May 13, 2021. Photo Credit: u/haydenchipleay on r/rit. https://www.reddit.com/r/rit/comments/nbtvho/some_suds_in_the_gosnell_fountain_to_celebrate

When one thinks about the “college experience,” what are the first ideas that come to mind? Perhaps one pictures the smaller moments, such as alcohol-fueled parties or flunking a midterm. Or one looks at the bigger picture: We might say that college is defined by being a time of firsts—our first lover, our first drink, our first test of true self-reliance, our first step into adulthood. But is this the universal experience of the American college student? Does a universal “college experience” exist? Simon Bronner inadvertently proves that one likely does exist. In his work documenting the folklore of colleges and universities across the United States, he showcased how much folklore is repeated almost word for word, just with the specific names swapped out (Bronner 2012). For example, almost every campus with an important statue has a spot on it that students rub for good luck, specifically for exams. At RIT, rubbing different parts of the Tiger Statue can offer different amounts of luck. Folklore is a direct reflection of a community’s shared and lived experiences, and so we can conclude that if there is similar folklore found across college campuses, there must be similar experiences that give birth to the folklore. With everything from food to textbooks becoming standardized across American colleges, perhaps the standardization of the college experience and subsequently the standardization of collegiate student folklore is to be expected. However, is this generalization too reductive of the varied experiences students have in college?



Version One of the RIT Iceberg, released to r/rit August 11, 2023. It features 120 entries of RIT folklore, history tidbits, and fun facts, https://www.reddit.com/r/rit/comments/15ocrfx/the_rit_iceberg.

RIT Iceberg Project

May 8, 2023: Initial inquiry sent out on r/rit. Research and data collection began.

August 11, 2023: Version One released on r/rit. It was a Reddit post with a link to the Google Doc of sources and descriptions of the entries. It had a total of 120 entries.

December 7, 2023: Work on Version Two started. It added 30 new entries.

August 1, 2024: Presentation at the RIT Undergraduate Research Symposium on the RIT Iceberg.

November 7, 2024: Chaired a panel at the American Folklore Society's Annual Meeting presenting on the RIT Iceberg and the importance of collegiate folklore.

December 14, 2024: With funding from the RIT History Department, formed a new team of History, Museum Studies, Humanities Computing, Design, and other majors to support the creation of a RIT Iceberg exhibit for ImagineRIT, RIT's annual festival of student creativity and innovation.

April 1, 2025: The first draft of this paper was submitted to the *Journal of Folklore and Education*.

April 26, 2025: At ImagineRIT 2025, an interactive museum exhibit explored the material culture and legacy of students at RIT. A demo of the new RIT Iceberg Website and Database were also showcased.

August 11, 2025: The two-year anniversary of the initial project is celebrated with the release of the new RIT Iceberg Lorehunters initiative. Work on Version Two continues, with a planned release by the end of the academic year.

Origins of The RIT Iceberg Project

The [RIT Iceberg Project](#) was forged from these questions and a desire to document the culture, both material and oral, of RIT students. As a member of the population that was the focus of my research, I had a unique insight into how to best obtain information. This started as a completely amateur hobby project, so without a formal education on best practices for fieldwork, archival research, and data organization, I had to learn much of it on the fly. From the beginning of this research project, I knew that my end goal was to create a web-based community resource that will primarily be used by other RIT students—past, present, and future. I wanted this project to be someplace where students could learn more about the campus they lived on, and where they could also contribute by sharing folklore of their own, creating a permanent repository of the collective folklore knowledge of RIT students. Thus, I tailored my work initially not to be primarily academic and scholarly, but comprehensible, accessible, and shareable by the average student.

The first question I had to decide on was where the end product would reside. With my target audience of other technologically adept RIT students in mind, I decided that it needed to be digital, and not just a simple website, but something highly visible and usable. For this, I chose Reddit. There were several reasons, first being that the subreddit [r/rit](#) is the biggest digital community of RIT students and alumni, with over 30,000 members, many who actively participate and engage with it every day. Second, posts on Reddit would be easily searchable: If someone were to just overhear “the RIT Iceberg” and search it online, my post would automatically be at the top of the search results, without having to do any search engine optimization on my own. Third, being a social media site, Reddit is built for easy sharing and access, thus boosting the reach of this project. Finally, r/rit itself is a repository of RIT

folklore. It is among the oldest of any college subreddit and was once the largest as well. It has posts from over a decade ago preserved, so it felt natural to give back to this repository with my own research for future generations. Other options, such as institutionalized repositories like the RIT Archives, have a more difficult time maintaining folklore collections, because of the less tangible nature of this information.

In Version One, the content of the Reddit post consisted of two main pieces: the Iceberg image and the [Sources Google Doc](#). For this project to achieve its goal of connecting with other RIT students and being spread around naturally, it had to be viral. The iceberg format was chosen to accomplish this. This format can be most accurately described as an internet meme based on the saying that something is “the tip of the iceberg” (meaning that something is only a small part of a much larger thing, i.e., “only scratching the surface”), and it is used to categorize entries based on obscurity. The less recognizable the entry is to the general public, the deeper into the “depths” of the iceberg it is placed. Content with darker, more negative connotations are also often placed in the depths of the iceberg image to symbolize that underneath the surface where no light shines lurk evil and the unknown, not unlike the deep sea fish that look almost alien when compared to the surface-dwelling fish we are accustomed to.

The iceberg format is a popular meme template used for a wide variety of subjects, from movies to American cities, which helped it clear the first hurdle of being viral. Most students already know what an iceberg meme is, so by turning this project into one, I was instantly able to display all the information in a much more appealing way than a typical academic paper. Icebergs are also very engaging as they gamify their subject. An iceberg turns its content from a list of scattered entries to a game to see how many you know, and how “deep” (both literally and symbolically) your knowledge of the subject is. Students can compete to see who knows more entries from the image and quickly look up entries they don’t recognize. This does, however, introduce complications when used for scholarly work, as someone has to be the decider on how “recognizable” each entry is. For an iceberg to work, the entries have to be sorted from most known to least, and this subjective metric can be difficult to properly assess. So, to rank the entries, I tried to combine the objective number of written and image sources that each entry has, with my subjective observations on how frequently I saw and heard them discussed, to best approximate the “recognizability” of each item.

While the Iceberg image displayed only the names of each of the entries, the linked Sources Google Doc contained hyperlinks to all collected images, web pages, news articles, videos, and more, as well as descriptions of each entry. I chose Google Docs because it offered many advantages. Every RIT student gets access to a Google account, so everyone could access the document, and share it with others, but most importantly, it worked well for building a community resource. Readers could leave comments and corrections to the written work, creating a malleable and living document where new perspectives could be easily added. Using a single Google Doc also allows users to use the search feature to quickly locate specific text or key phrases.

It was only after my first-ever meeting with the staff of the RIT Archives December 20, 2023, when I realized that what I had previously considered to be nothing more than a hobbyist project could have scholastic merit. The RIT Archives immediately pushed me to submit to the American Folklore Society’s (AFS) upcoming Annual Meeting, telling me that “they would eat this up and

ask for seconds.” They gave me a copy of the definitive tome of the history of RIT, the second edition of *Rochester Institute of Technology: Industrial Development and Educational Innovation in an American City 1829-2006*, by the late RIT Professor Emeritus Dane R. Gordon. Additionally, they recommended Simon Bronner’s *Campus Traditions: Folklore from the Old-Time College to the Modern Mega-University*, which would be my gateway into the world of professional folklore research. Their inspiring encouragement and enthusiasm ultimately led me to turn this hobbyist project into scholastic work. I quickly began work on the second version, using the resources of the RIT Archives to do my first foray into archival research, while also planning my panel at the AFS Annual Meeting, November 7, 2025, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Joined by Professors Sheila Bock from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and John McDowell from Indiana University, we focused on our different perspectives into the wealth of collegiate folklore. When I started this project in May, 2023, with a now seemingly innocent sounding public call for story submissions from members of r/rit, I never expected that this would be the path my journey would go down.

Version Two of the RIT Iceberg Project will feature a brand-new website for a more visually appealing display of the content; an expanded Google Doc with better layout, descriptions, and images; a new downloadable database of sources hosted on Google Drive; and a documentary video on every entry, posted to my [YouTube channel](#). This database is a simple .zip file of folders that features a preserved copy of the sources for each entry, so any interested student can download and use it. Version One released with 120 unique entries, with Version Two adding another 30 to the list. This project contains more than folklore, as entries include RIT “fun facts” and “historical tidbits,” although the differentiation between these three groupings is often blurred. Overall, this project largely centers around the student experience at RIT but also aims to broaden student knowledge about RIT. It covers everything from the founding of the Rochester Athenaeum, RIT’s predecessor, to modern social media controversies. It chronicles both historical and contemporary events, people, and stories.



The Make Moves Son House, across the street from RIT, was recently demolished. It was once the site of the now famous graffiti, March 11, 2019. Photo Credit: Alan Meekins’ Medium article *Make Moves Son*.

Methodology

To create the project, much had to be drawn from personal accounts of RIT students, alumni, staff, and faculty. One of the biggest sources of information and perspectives were old websites, videos, and posts on social media. r/rit, YouTube, Snapchat, YikYak, and Facebook contained a treasure trove of dated posts with people I could reach out to for further details or potential information. A majority of the work for Version One was done using only digital sources and interviews. It was only after its publication that I introduced my independent research project to the

RIT Archives, where I could employ archival research to add additional sources for Version Two. Interviews became a core pillar of my research, and I conducted dozens over direct messages on social media sites with students and alumni. Eventually, I would also conduct at least three recorded interviews, which were posted on YouTube.

With this being my first major research project, I made a lot of mistakes during creation of Version One. Having little experience in fieldwork and data organization, I did not meaningfully organize all the various photos, interviews, and other media I received. Sometimes I spent just as much time trying to locate an old chat message as I did researching new content. Creating a detailed plan and organizational structure prior to gathering data is a lesson I learned the hard way.

With its many digital sources, much of the information for the project had to be obtained from sometimes defunct web pages. In some cases, I would have to act as a digital detective to try to recover a source. The Internet Archive proved invaluable, as it preserves old pages that would otherwise be lost. In one memorable case, I was able to recover .mpeg video files from 1999, some of which had seemingly been lost to time, and was able to convert them to the more modern .mp4 file type to save in the database. With some internet sleuthing, and by cross referencing different threads on social media platforms and message boards, I was able to narrow down the specific dates of events and create timelines where none existed before.



The Sentinel Statue by Albert Paley is said to give power to the RIT President to control the weather around RIT. It is colloquially known to students as the Weather Machine. Photo Credit: The RIT Sentinel Society.

<https://www.rit.edu/giving/sentinel-society>

Types and Themes of RIT Student Folklore

Analyzing specifically the folklore entries in the RIT Iceberg reveals common groups and themes that permeate the collection. RIT student folklore can be categorized into six types. First are Legends and Myths, such as the persisting urban legend that the campus of RIT was originally designed to be built in Arizona, before the plans were purchased and built in upstate New York instead. Despite the factual inaccuracies with this and other similar urban legends at RIT, they are continuously passed down from generation to generation. Second are Locations: places on campus where notable things have either happened, or where lore is tied to them. The Sentinel, a massive metal statue in the center of campus designed by the sculptor Albert Paley and installed in 2003, is said to give RIT Presidents the power to control the weather. They use it to ensure that there are cloudless sunny skies during major RIT events such as Orientation. Third are Heroes, people of great renown (for good or bad) within the RIT student body. If you attend an RIT hockey game, our most popular sporting event, you will likely see the number one RIT hockey fan, Big Goon, who leads the Corner Crew (the rowdiest fans in all of RIT) in many chants, dances, and rituals. Fourth are Events: single-time

occurrences that weave themselves into the fabric of RIT's folklore. The 2004 Colonypalooza is deemed to be a legendary party, with over 500 students attending. It only ended when riot police broke up the event, shooting rubber bullets and tear gas into the crowd, injuring several people. Next are Traditions, largely attributed to certain clubs and organizations. The metal tiger statue in the center of campus often receives a custom woven sweater during the winter season, courtesy of the knitting club RIT Hooks & Needles. Other objects like tree sticks, magazines, and even pineapples can sometimes be found in the tiger's maw. And, of course, rubbing the tiger is said to offer good luck on your next exam, with better grades depending on what part of the tiger you rub. Finally, there are many Sayings that spring up in chalk or bathroom graffiti all across campus. These include *Make Moves Son* (along with other variations such as *Make Movies Son* and the Covid-19 era *Wash Hands Son*), *good and you?*, *I'm Going to Fight Science with Wood!*, *bees?*, *4pi*, *milf polycule*, *gunk*, and many others that reference various inside jokes over the years. Some reference unique RIT events. Supposedly, *Make Moves Son* refers to a video shown during the 2007 Freshman Orientation. The origins of others have been lost to time, but these phrases persist, even when no one remembers what they actually mean.

Alongside these six main types, RIT student folklore also falls into one of three broad origin themes. First, some are born from students adapting to the new, vast, and uncertain college environment where many are alone for the first time. The uncertainty they feel in this alienating environment can be remedied by making light of the campus, thus making it feel familiar. Pranks like hanging a pirate flag on The Sentinel statue or writing songs that become unofficial RIT student anthems, such as student band Liquid X's 2009 "*RloT Rich*" (a parody of Big Tymers' "*Still Fly*"), are examples. They offer a way for students to cope with their anxieties. Second, some folklore is born through individuals trying to connect with a student group through traditions. By participating in a shared experience with a group of like-minded individuals, students can forge a strong bond among themselves. At every rule-orientation session for the RIT Humans vs Zombies Club, a weeklong Nerf blaster game that is played on campus, the story of the Quarter Mile Incident is retold. The story goes that a player jumped off a small bridge to avoid being tagged by zombies that blocked both exits (the player was allegedly fine, although they did break both their legs and were still tagged, teaching a good lesson on the folly of hubris). This story might be fabricated and is likely an amalgamation of a couple of different stories from the first few years of the club. Even so, it serves as a memorable and informative traditional story for members of the club. Finally, some folklore is born from the conflict between students and school administration and authority. Students naturally resist authority as they continue to grow into independent adults, and perceiving school administration as out of touch and ignoring student needs leads some students to rebel. Pranks, as well as satirical student newspapers such as *The Distorter* or *Gracies Dinnertime Theatre* are ways students can voice that frustration.

Generally, most RIT student folklore falls under one of these six types, and reflects one of these three origin themes. However, there are outliers. The Mousepad Couch, a couch made up of hundreds of computer mouse pads once located in the basement office of an adjunct professor, can probably be classified as either Legends and Myths or Locations, but it does not neatly fall into any of the three origin themes. It gained its folklore status through the absurdity of the concept and the visceral feeling that the image evokes (one student told me it reminds them of a "liminal space," i.e., in this context they referred to it being an eerie or surreal transitive space). These outliers may imply that a fourth origin theme might exist: that sometimes, students just find things inexplicably

funny or absurd enough to tell other students, thus creating folklore whose origins cannot be deduced through scholarly analysis. Knowing these folklore types and themes, as well as outlier examples, helps us start to better understand the students who are creating and maintaining the folklore.



The Mousepad Couch once existed in the office of former RIT adjunct professor Jeremy Sieminski, November 5, 2005. It once served as a place for meetings and relaxation but now exists only in folklore. Photo Credit: Sieminski's personal website, preserved on the Web Archive. <https://web.archive.org/web/20051105024252/http://www.rit.edu/~jpsdss/couch>

These types and themes of RIT folklore echo the common motifs that Bronner's work showcases across American institutions, no matter the locations, population, and specializations. While there are folkloric differences (for example, RIT does not have a prevalent ghost legend), of the most prevalent RIT college student folklore, there isn't anything unique to just RIT. But just because there is an "universal college experience" does not mean that individuality ceases to exist. If you look deeper into the folkloric fabric of campuses, you'll find "ex nihilo folklore": hyper specific and hyper individualistic folklore (also known as "inside jokes") created by a small group of students for use within their group. Millions of ex nihilo folklore examples are spoken into existence and promptly forgotten every day, but they serve as a reminder to not overgeneralize the universality of the student and their experiences.

Collegiate Folklore: Untapped Potential

In 1865, the biologist Gregor Mendel published a paper proving the existence of inheritable genetic traits. He did this by analyzing many generations of pea plants, whose short lifespan allowed him to observe generational changes in just a few years that other species would take decades or even centuries to see. In much the same way, college campuses are the pea plants of folklore. Colleges represent a microcosm of society, a miniature version of the outside world that is largely self-contained. That makes the campus an ideal place for folkloric research. The main benefit of colleges from a folklore perspective is that their student body cycles out completely every four to five years. Like the short generational lifespan of the pea plant, the short generational lifespan of a student body before they graduate and largely stop affecting college folklore is the holy grail of folklore research test subjects. Just as Mendel was able to observe genetic traits in the pea plants and extrapolate this discovery to longer-living species, so too can the student body be the perfect place to observe the fundamentals of folklore, which can then be extrapolated to other, longer-living, communities.

While a single individual cannot personally see the full changes of several generations of human groups, they can live through dozens of full generations of college students. They can see firsthand how folklore is born, disseminated from student to student, generation to generation, dies, and is reborn. They can take away these important lessons and extrapolate them to other communities, such as uncovering the true power of social media at preserving or distorting folklore in this current digital age. By witnessing what social media posts are still discussed after the original student body has fully left the student population, maybe researchers can infer the power, or lack of power, that social media has on spreading folklore. They could analyze the folkloric strength of graffiti, for example, and how successful it is in preserving stories, and observe whether students still remember the meaning of the graffiti after a generation or two. They could run tests to see whether oral stories, written works, or images are most effective at preserving folklore.

Collegiate folklore, with its everyday expressions, jokes, and stories, is a scholarly vital field. Not just within the folklore itself, but in the mechanisms of folklore production and reproduction. The works of Simon Bronner, Elizabeth Tucker, Sheila Bock, John McDowell, and others are indeed excellent. However, this field is vast. Projects like the RIT Iceberg or McDowell's [Folklore of Student Life](#) that do extensive surveying of the folkloric tapestry of their specific institution should be the norm, not the exception. For folklorists to be able to fully grasp the potential of collegiate folklore, every college, university, and institute should have a project of a similar caliber that tries to record as much of their own student's folklore as possible. Once that is established, then creating comparative works such as Bronner or Tucker's analyses of the folklore of American college students will become much easier and effective.

But, most importantly, when possible, the study of collegiate folklore should be a student-driven endeavor. Students created this folklore, first and foremost, for their own benefit. They understand better than anyone the significance of their own stories, jokes, and legends. Whether it be to quickly connect with established groups, or to show their individuality against the rigidity of school authority, folklore shapes the experience students have in college. Additionally, while uncovering the fundamentals of folklore is largely to the benefit of folklore scholars, the cultural repository is most useful to the student. Collegiate folklore is among the most fickle forms of folklore, being quickly born and erased from collective memory at an accelerated pace. The rapid

cycling of student body generations, while a key benefit for understanding the fundamentals of folklore, also has the downside that their folklore, if not recorded, is lost just as rapidly. Students' shared culture is actively eroded. Thus, it is imperative that students, with their unique knowledge of their peers, lead this effort with the support of folklore scholars. After all, both groups benefit greatly from this endeavor: Students preserve their cultural group heritage, and scholars learn more truths about the essence of folklore.

How do we start building these community initiatives? One way is through the classroom. Faculty who teach folklore to students could create a semester-long project tasking a class with cataloguing the folklore of their peers. Not only would this be intrinsically motivating, as it has a direct connection to the class, but such a project would also allow students to practice all aspects of folklore research. First, they would have to identify sources of knowledge, whether online communities on Reddit, Discord, or Facebook, or other current students or alumni. Then, the class could split into several smaller teams. One team could lead interviews of current students and alumni, while other teams could cover archival and library research, perusing digital materials, and creating a central accessible repository for all the information. At the end of the semester, the class will have learned every aspect of folkloric research and gained valuable field experience and a deeper understanding of their own communities, thus becoming sources of knowledge that future generations of students could draw from. Finally, their repository could be built upon by several iterations of the class, resulting in a community resource that effectively improves the shared knowledge of the entire student population. Such a class project would be the perfect introduction for students interested in delving into folklore in an academic setting and serve as their gateway into this field, as it did for me. For example, look into John McDowell's [Folklore of Student Life](#) website, which was built by several classes over 17 years. It stands as a testament to what can be done if classes work together to do folkloric research.



The *I'm Going To Fight Science With Wood!* tunnel mural, once a staple of RIT student culture, has since been painted over, and even finding surviving photos of it was a challenge. Photo Credit: Kim Slawson, from Facebook.

The Durability of Digital Folklore

Another important reflection from this project is the question of the durability of digital folklore. Is data ephemeral? In an era of digital AI deep fakes, can it even be trusted to begin with? Aside from a physical signed copy of the RIT Iceberg Version Two that will reside in the RIT Archives, if Reddit decided to remove the post, or Google shut down the Google Docs that the document resides in, or the Google Sites that hosts the website, what will be left? Even the printed copy of the RIT Iceberg would be mostly useless, as most of its value comes from the hundreds of hyperlinks that it so carefully curated. For every website, there is another where the owner lost access long ago, sending it to the digital graveyard. Folklore is inherently ephemeral. It fades from our collective

knowledge if it's not recorded or passed down. Digital tools, such as video and audio recordings, are powerful tools for folklorists. However, it is equally important to use them in the correct ways. This project showcased the fragility of our current digital infrastructure. Photos went missing, pages got deleted, and entire websites got shut down. Even something as important as the RITpedia, the RIT wiki maintained by the RIT Student Government, has been completely offline and inaccessible for over a year. None of their pages were preserved. As you create digital folklore, think about how folklorists a hundred years in the future will be able to use it. While no system is permanent, one of the best ways to preserve your own digital work is to archive it with the Internet Archive. You can manually save your own pages, thus ensuring they are accessible on the [Wayback Machine](#). While the Wayback Machine can automatically archive pages, it doesn't get every single website.

Saving copies in multiple places can also help prevent data loss. Even something seemingly permanent, such as uploading a video to YouTube, can be undone if the video gets removed or the account gets deleted, rendering the video unrecoverable. Upload video files to other file-sharing services like Google Drive or Dropbox, and provide accessible links. Finally, definitely do not solely rely on cloud services. Save a copy (preferably two) to separate hard drives kept close by. Develop a physical storage system to ensure you don't lose data. Past me would have had so much less work if people followed these tips and cared about preserving their digital history.



The soaped fountain: a symbol of a vibrant student culture at RIT, May 14, 2021. Photo Credit: u/Quarter_Adorable on r/rit.

<https://www.reddit.com/r/rit/comments/nbtvho/comment/gy36ta0>

The Toll of Time: Looking Ahead

We return to the soapy fountain that started this journey. Perhaps, all that this represents is an immature prank from bored college students who want to cause a little bit of destruction. That's certainly what most school administrators would see: petty vandalism that causes more headaches for the already overworked groundskeepers. Citing repair cost and environmental concerns, the fountain is shut off almost the entirety of the year, often only getting turned on for important RIT events like Graduation. Yet, like clockwork, soap always finds its way into the fountain. Is there any point to it at all? I would argue against such a simple interpretation. This fountain represents something much more important: a thriving student culture that should be cherished, nurtured, and preserved. It represents the presence and impact of students, and their ability to morph their campus environment to their liking. The fact that this tradition has persisted for years and several cycles of student populations shows the vitality of student culture and the shared student experience. Often, school administrators make policy decisions without considering the effects on the student experience. They may see it as unimportant,

insignificant, or even a nuisance. They pick and choose what they elevate to official “school spirit” status and only support the traditions that they view as improving the school. This does a disservice to the thriving community beliefs that exist within college student populations, clubs, organizations, classes, and friend groups. Students are as much a part of the campus as the faculty and staff, and I would argue even more so. Students are the entire reason colleges exist as an institution. Administrators should recognize that students have an equal right and responsibility to care for the campus and find ways to work together to create a safe, productive, and healthy student culture.

The toll of time will one day reach me, and my time at RIT will be over. I leave behind only the RIT Iceberg, the RIT Iceberg Lorehunters, and a dream that I make the lives of the next generation of hobby historians and folklorists at RIT easier. If they use my research as the foundation for theirs, they could go deeper than I ever could in my limited time here. I hope that this community resource that I have developed will continue to be referenced long after my generation leaves RIT. I also hope that my writing will inspire you to look within your own institutions, within your own students. Ask them about the stories they care about. What are their experiences? What are their perspectives? Their values? Their morals? Students can educate teachers as much as teachers educate students. Never forget that.

Addendum Launched on the [two-year anniversary of Version One](#), on August 11th, 2025, Version Two of the RIT Iceberg Project coincided with the formal launch of the [RIT Iceberg Lorehunters](#). This is a new cultivated community of interested RIT students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members who want to continue the work of the RIT Iceberg. This group will seek and document RIT folklore, long after the original creators of the project graduate. They will also gain ownership of the RIT Iceberg and will work to maintain it, ensuring it stays up to date and relevant for future generations. The RIT Iceberg Lorehunters are hosted on a Discord server. Version Two will be released by the end of the 2025-26 academic year.

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Classroom Connections: Create Your Own Folklore Iceberg

This classroom activity can be adapted for a group discussion. Earlier in this paper, I recommended creating a semester-long Iceberg class project. If that is not feasible, this activity will achieve similar goals. Both the semester-long project and this smaller activity are suited for introductory folklore, social studies, and language arts classes. First, have a class discussion to start to define what folklore is, so that everyone is starting with the same understanding. Have students pair off into groups of three to five and generate a list of ten pieces of folklore they know from their school. These can include legends, myths, pranks, jokes, sayings, traditions, stories, memes, graffiti, etc. Then, have them rank each entry based on how much they think that folklore is known by their entire student body, with one being most recognizable, and ten being the most obscure. Reconvene the class and ask the following discussion questions.

To adapt this activity for a middle or high school level, you could broaden the scope from just the educational institute to also include the town, county, or state. This will make the research portion easier, as your students will have more information to work with. For the questions below, simply replace any instance of “student body” with “population” if you go down this route. Alternatively, you could still have the focus on just the school and its folklore, providing a valuable opportunity for students to dig deep and reflect on their surroundings.

From where did you draw your list of folklore? Personal experience, social media, passed down stories, or somewhere else?

What are the “types” of folklore that you chose? Are there commonalities?

What are the “origin themes” of the folklore that you chose? Are there common themes?

How did you determine your rankings of “recognizability”? Was your group a good judge of it, or did you discover shortcomings? If so, what would you do differently?

What aspects of the student body are not recognized in your list of folklore? Maybe certain student organizations or groups are excluded, while others are overrepresented?

Is any of your folklore harmful in its content to certain groups, and if so, to whom and why?

What would you do to expand your list of student body folklore to one hundred entries?

In the Prologue (page XV) of Campus Traditions, Simon Bronner outlines the frame theory that he uses for interpreting collegiate folklore: “The concept is that students imagine boundaries between themselves and other campus interests and consequently construct or engage with social frames for speech, actions, narratives, and rituals that might not be appropriate in another setting or in everyday practice. The intangible frames for traditional action understood by participants are useful strategies to deal with issues of aging and social connection that cause anxiety or ambivalence and are difficult to broach in everyday conversation.

Do you agree with Bronner’s frame theory as a good way of interpreting collegiate folklore? Why or why not? What might be its shortcomings, if any?

Easier Alternative Question (To the above question): Where does folklore come from? What motivates people to create it? Is there some central motivator for all folklore creation?